**School Culture**

The overall culture of the school is an integral part of the reform process at Hickory High School. School culture can be difficult to define, but influences every part of the daily operations of a school. Hoy and Miskel (2001) suggest that culture consists of shared assumptions, values, and norms. The staff at Hickory High School is divided, which has had a negative effect on the culture of the school. The task faced by the administration at Hickory High School is to develop an action plan to improve the culture of the school.

An assessment of the current attitudes shared by the staff is important in determining what steps need to be taken to begin to change the culture at Hickory High School. The divide among the staff seems to involve those that are interested in participating in reform efforts and those who do not seem interested in participating. The principal needs to encourage the staff members who are willing to take on a leadership role, as well as find out why the remaining staff is hesitant toward change. There is also a divide among experienced teachers and new teachers. One possible way to encourage collaboration might be to pair the new teachers with an experienced teacher for a year as an informal mentor or “buddy”. These pairs could work together on projects throughout the year. The experienced teachers have a wealth of knowledge and experience, while the new teachers have enthusiasm and can offer a different perspective to situations. If a middle ground can be found and the divided staff members feel comfortable working together, the staff will benefit as a whole and begin to operate as a cohesive unit.

When considering school reform, the relationship between leadership and school improvement must be considered (Harris, 2004). The leadership style of Jim O’Connor must be evaluated. As the superintendent, I would meet with Mr. O’Connor and have him complete a self- evaluation of his leadership style. I would then ask him to reflect on this and together he and I would devise an action plan for the school to improve morale, encourage leadership, and foster a collaborative environment within the school. An administrator’s role must be one of “culture builder” (Owens, 2010). Jim O’Connor’s role is vital in changing the culture of Hickory High School.

Community and stakeholder involvement also plays a role in the culture of a school. I would form a committee within the school comprised of representation from each department to be ambassadors for the school. This group would reach out to local businesses, community leaders, and organizations in the area to request their support for Hickory High School. I would invite community members and business owners to Hickory High School as often as possible so that they can see firsthand the positive changes that are being made. The staff and students will also benefit from the feeling of support from the community.

Technology can assist in the efforts to improve school culture. Technology has had a positive effect on Hickory high School this year. Test scores rose last year as all classrooms were outfitted with at least fifteen computers and the district has obtained the necessary equipment to make the schools technology centers. However, the amount of teacher and student use has been disappointing. This provides administration with an opportunity to provide support, assistance, and training to the staff in order for the teachers to feel comfortable with the new technology. This would also provide another opportunity for the staff to collaborate. Newer teachers may have more experience in integrating technology that they can share with teachers who may feel less comfortable with how to use the new technology in their classrooms.